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Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the Council of Youth

The Prior of Taizé writes :

In a long night always lit by a flame, however hidden, we are moving onwards, perhaps without realising it.

It is because of the unique resources of mutual trust among us all that we dare take risks, sustaining one another as we go.

Each of us undertaking to live out his own part, we will set out together through a narrow channel. There is no possibility of re-birth except by this limited passage-way.

In two years time will begin an alternation : on one hand the adventure lived within us, on the other hand a public adventure to be lived for — and with — many others : the Council of Youth.

Your brother Roger

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16 000 Young People

Obviously, we were going to be a large crowd for Easter : we might even be 10 000 ? And in the end we were 16 000 young people at Taizé, from 80 different countries all over the world. So the church had to be enlarged, by means of two huge circus « big-tops ». And how to translate simultaneously through loudspeakers to the 2000 German-speakers and the 2500 Italians who were there ? There were scarcely enough head-phones for the translations into Spanish and English.

If it was possible for 16 000 young people to be made welcome, that is mainly due to the fact that so many people felt that they were personally responsible. There are those who gave up their sleep for work that was sometimes very hard. There were 500 who had arrived several days in advance in order to form a number of teams, designed to be for the service of all. This is a sign that the actual Council of Youth itself will be able to take place peacefully.

All through the days of Holy Week, there were meetings organised by groups of 100 ; in this way the large numbers were not felt as a burden and an obstacle : the groups of 100 were constantly breaking into small reflexion-groups of 10. All the groups met under some 50 large tents or in a few old chicken sheds. The main reason for being together was the celebration of the risen Christ. The sharing in the small groups was designed above all to allow each one to see what the preparation of the council of youth means in his own life.

On one evening there are 60 different meetings available, taking into account the different directions of our searching and the different languages spoken.

It is essential during this time to leave the inhabitants of the village of Taizé undisturbed, so all the meeting is limited to the hill-top, where there is a whole village of brightly colored tents.

In a tent there is a small snack-bar organised by the young people of the meeting All the soft drinks sold

Next big International Meeting in Taizé
Whitsun (20 - 22 May)

there are available at cost price, with no profit (there was finally a small deficit). The same system will work during the summer, the aim being to short-circuit any attempt to commercialise and so introduce the consumer society onto the hill. It is obvious that the numbers of young people coming to Taizé is going to tempt some people to try to cash in on this. For example : a few months ago we learnt by chance that there was a plan to build a large hotel and motel complex right next to Taizé. We think that we have now managed to discourage such a project.

The fact of being split in a large number of small groups emphasises by contrast the communion when all are together for the common prayer, three times each day. All through Holy Week we follow the events of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, in communion with all the men who, throughout the world, at that moment are living the passion of Christ in their mind or body...

Constantly, day and night alike, there are young people praying in silence in the crypt of the church of reconciliation. During the day, brothers and priests are present in the church so that any who wish may find a chance for a few moments of personal exchange.

Easter Morning : the celebration of the Resurrection. Then, during the afternoon, in the small groups, the reflexion centred on a sentence of the meditation of brother Roger who, that morning, had said : « *... hasten, if needs be from one end of the earth to the other, towards the man who is despised, scorned, rejected...* » Who, for me, is that man ? All through the day people greet each other with the paschal greeting : « *Christ is risen. He is truly risen !* »

Br. Roger announces the date of the Council of Youth

Easter Sunday evening, many from the region joined with the 16 000 already here. Mass was celebrated by a young priest from Togoland. He conveyed messages of greetings sent by the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople. He indicated also the numerous telegrammes that had come from youth around he world.

The Mass was attended by Cardinal Koenig, Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, and President of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers. Greeting specially those who were not Christian and those who had lost their faith, he went on to appeal to everyone not to disappoint those for whom the preparation for the Council of Youth was a sign of hope. Also present was Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who had only returned from the U.S.A. the evening before. A few days previously, he had published a message in which, among other points, he noted the fact that this was his fourth visit to Taizé within the space of a year. Patriarch Athenagoras was represented by the Metropolitan Timiadis.

After the Mass, came the moment for Br. Roger to announce the date of the Council of Youth. Here is the text of what he said :

Why, over the last two years, this interior adventure ? And why is there a happiness underlying all our struggles ? « Happy the heart that is poor » : *it is a source of festival.*

Such happiness, this adventure, a whole world hidden in us — these things are able to fill seemingly bottomless deeps of our person. They set us free from the oppressive manner of living that has left its mark on every one of us in our civilised societies, to a greater or lesser extent : as though for many people such festival were simply a chance event, an accident due to vanish rapidly.

Shall we refuse that happiness then ? Never ! Because when we start to become aware of its presence within us, we find that it is out of these depths of joy that, gradually, we learn to create gratuitous life, festival.

And from these sources spring up in us poetry, spontaneity, originality — the ability to make a creative use of every event, however small, however difficult, the ability to build, even on our struggles for others, on loss of friendship, on the withdrawal of some who give up, on the death of people we love.

The risen Christ makes a festival of man's life.

Both here at Taizé and in distant parts of the world, together with many young people, we have tried to turn over the dried-up earth of our lives in order to be able to live this adventure within us. There have been meetings in every part of the earth, with no way of putting a price on the treasures of friendship and of mutual trust that are the result of so many discoveries.

But we have discovered shadows as well. During recent months certain ways that might allow christians to come closer have been pointed out. And the result of these suggestions has been a backlash of fear. We here at Taizé have been subjected to almost unbearable pressures. And we have discovered that people are afraid of youth : afraid that here we are too attentive to youth. I have even been told : « These young folk will end up by having you on a lead » *!*

But we must forget these rearguard squabbles. For then the most striking thing that emerges is : so much searching, a plurality of aspirations, a dynamic force capable of carrying us far ahead, very far.

It is important to know : no great adventure together can be accomplished without the appearance of temptations ; Christ himself met with them. To him, the seducer offered all the nations of the earth if he would become subject to him, the divider. For all of us there are names

for those « nations of the earth » : the illusory attempt to gain influence over others, the desire for power. Sterility will be the sure result.

Do we know how to watch and pray so as not to enter into temptation? Do we realise that, at the very opposite of the gratuitousness of a heart that is poor, there is the spirit of domination which could even lead to using the Council of Youth for oneself. And the result would be devastation, a kind of death.

Death and resurrection! Death and transfiguration! The two realities are part of a single adventure. On the one hand, the temptation to make use of others, to use them for one's own ends. And on the other hand, the transfiguration of our temptations, our impossibilities, our refusals. We have nothing to be afraid of in all that. Because even our struggle to come to limpidity of heart becomes festive.

As we give ourselves over to an interior adventure, we discover that it is not something that is restricted to ourselves — else it would be too selfish, too intimistic, and one day would turn sour on us.

But when there is that adventure aflame within us, there comes a moment when, irresistibly, it drives us to live Christ for man. It pushes us up onto a mountain and there, as Christ says, there is a city brightly lit, so as to be seen by all men. Therein lies the vocation to be universal : to be men and women of communion with others.

It is certain that if, bit by bit, we are advancing on an interior adventure, it is in order to prepare ourselves to live a public adventure together. And that involves the courage to take enormous risks.

The end-point of this daring adventure is this : after listening to and summing up all the innumerable intuitions of very many people, I am now able to announce to you that in two years' time, in 1974, the Council of Youth will begin...

For technical reasons, errors occured in the distribution of the last number of the « Letter from Taizé ». *Some people received it twice, etc., Please let us know about any mistake so that the mailing list can be put in order.*

The Council of youth will begin in 1974
It will last for several years

Every time the applause following the announcement began to die down, it immediately broke out again somewhere in the tents or the church. Finally, an Intercontinental Team (Isidore and Marie-Eugenie, a young couple from Africa, Margarita Moyano from Argentina, Nestor and Olga, a couple from South America, Moiz from India, and Jeanine from Vietnam) began to trace the general lines of the two years remaining before us and set out the theme for 1972.

They began by underlining the extraordinary achievement of the last two years. It was this had made it possible to speed up the process of preparation and to announce that the Council could begin as early as two years hence and will be a « public adventure ». That is : The expression of the interior adventure being lived by youth throughout the world during the period of preparation. The following text, which was read by the Team, sums up the intuitions of a great many young people :

Imagination and Courage : to become signs of contradiction

We have only two more years in front of us and during them we shall not be afraid to take risks. Two years is a short time in comparison with the enormous strides which we must accomplish in our common commitment.

These two years will be years of *imagination* during which we shall search for the precise, concrete form the Council of Youth will have.

They will also be years of *courage*, during which we shall be trying to hasten towards man's tomorrow, towards a technological civilisation with enormous potential for the promotion of the whole of mankind. However, we shall not hesitate, if it is necessary, to become *signs of contradiction*, when profit and consumer-values become dominant.

As we draw on the Risen Christ as a source, we are invited to *create constantly*, to bring to re-birth rather than simply reform. This is the exact opposite of an easy option : nothing is created easily.

Although a desperate lack of confidence in man pervades the present time, we know that « *the Risen Christ will give us enough imagination and courage* ».

So for two more years we shall continue our *interior adventure*, as part of the hidden, underground movement of the Church, sometimes living even a certain clandestinity. We shall continue to use only poor means. Then the world-wide Council of Youth will begin.

The intuition of youth : take risks that are demanding

During the past two years of searching and preparation several basic insights have emerged :

Cells and Grass - roots communities : Some cells, having proved themselves, and after sufficient reflection, will reach a point where they evolve into small base-communities. These will be temporary (one or two years) and will be deeply committed to prayer, action in favour of mankind, sharing (including the sharing of goods), and striving to be signs of contradiction able to break with situations where man is victimised. They will attempt to live a more complete reciprocity between workers, students and rurals ; they will try to be attentive to those who are often not listened to — migrants, refugees, etc. They will be many small seeds, hidden yet heralds of transformation. Previous experience as a cell will be essential before coming together as a grass - roots community. Thus our manner of living the preparation for the Council of Youth will be diversified, taking at least three forms : for some it will be a solitary quest, others will be part of fluid, ever-changing cells, still others will form part of grass-roots communities with more defined commitments.

More intensive exchanges : Many young people will be called on to make more specific commitments (for example, making themselves available for one year). Among other things, they will be called to move from city to city, as in the early Church, intensifying exchanges between people and preparing themselves to be the pillers of the Council of Youth.

Suggestions for the meetings : at Taizé itself, the form of the meetings will have to change completely. Every week, instead of a single united meeting, there have to be seven different meetings simultaneously :

by age-groups,
by main concern,
for those starting out on the reflexion,
for those who have begun and want to go on from there.

And since we are staying underground, there will be no multiplication of meetings in different places. For the next two years, there will only be continental meetings, one in each continent.

Young and old : two years ago we announced : « The Council of Youth will be composed of a majority of young people but, so as to avoid any segregation, adults and old people and even children will take part in it ».

The moment will come when adults, in limited numbers, must be called to live a radical commitment. From October, a small number of provisional grass roots communities made up of adults will be formed. Parallel with the communities of young people, their life-style will be a demanding experience.

Fragmentation and communion : our long march together continues to suppose that there is a process for summing-up the whole of the preparation, as there has been in these first two years. The variety of cells and of basic communities is something valuable, expressing all the variety of our aspirations. But many fear an easy way out : that our pluralism lead us into a fragmentation in which we would lose all sense of communion.

An Appeal to everyones Imagination

A vast preliminary consultation will take place in 1972. During this year of imagination and courage, each one is called to answer in writing, before December 1972, five questions — to be thought about alone or in cells or in basic communities :

1) How, concretely, do you envisage the Council of Youth (ways of working, themes, etc.) ?

2) Taking into account the great diversity of countries and situations, what life-style can be imagined, for those wanting to intensify the preparation of the Council of Youth and who are not afraid to become signs of contradiction, according to the Gospel, rather than let themselves be taken over by the system that they live under (money, profit, consumer society, careerism, etc.) ?

3) What are the means of being (alone, in cells or in communities) bearers of the festival of the Risen Christ, and how to transmit this in our societies, unbalanced as they are by abundance or poverty ?

4) How to help find a new face for the Church, allowing it to be bearer of that liberating festival for men ?

5) What really new individual or communal acts of courage can be imagined, so as to continue to struggle in poverty of heart, even going so far as to give ones life so that man be no longer victim of man ?

CELLS AND COMMUNITIES

The cell-groups continue to be one of the ways of preparing for the Council of Youth.

Yet at the same time, certain cells which have proved themselves will be called on, after careful reflexion, to transform themselves into small grass-roots communities. Through this, they will be more equipped to discover the meaning of their responsabilities in the preparation for the Council of Youth.

There is one fundamental difference between cells and communities. While the cells are extremely fluid, their composition constantly changing and their contours not clearly defined, the communities are much more stabilized. Their commitments are very demanding.

Joining together in « basic » communities must always depend on previous experience as a cell-group. Before beginning, long and careful consideration of the requirements is essential. Should they prove too demanding, it is better to continue for a time as a cell, and to come back to the question of communities later on.

What is specific to these grass-roots communities, compared with others that already exist, is their commitment in the preparation for the Council of Youth. They are thus in communion with the preparation in its entirety, and they are in regular communication with Taizé so as to participate in the constant process of recapitulation which characterises our going forward together.

> The communities will be highly diversified according to country and continent. However, there are several fundamental constants which appear evident. Here are some ideas on this. They are still only outlines and need to be worked on. Think about them and write to us with your suggestions. The Meeting at Whitsun in Taizé will be partly given to discussion of them.

The base-communities bring together, therefore, young people who are ready to go a long way in a commitment in view of the Council of Youth : people ready to take risks in the footsteps of the Risen Christ.

They remain provisional. They are small : three to seven people. They try to live in reciprocity between workers, students and people living in the country.

Generally, they do not imply living together under the same roof. They are founded on one and the same prayer, shared in common at least three times a week, and individually on days when it is not possible to meet together.

Members of communities attempt to live day by day in the spirit of the beatitudes : Joy, Simplicity and mercy, thus discovering ever anew the festival that the Risen Christ comes to quicken in the innermost heart of man.

Within each community, the sense of communion between the members is constantly built up by an animator. It is the animator who keeps regularly in touch with Taizé.

Like every Christian, the members of a grass roots community are searching : like the man who said to Christ : « Lord , I believe, help my unbelief ». Their faith, however, finds expression in the « Three - fold Celebration of the Risen Christ ». (Text of Easter 1970 : « We celebrate the Risen Christ in the Eucharist... we celebrate the Risen Christ through our love of the Church... we celebrate the Risen Christ in man our brother... ») « Christ is with each of us, whether we know him or not... and the first way for us to serve, surely, is for us to be for each person a revealer of that presence of Christ. »

Wherever they are, the grass roots communities are seeking to give concrete expression to the appeal to give our life so that man be no longer victim of man. At the risk of losing their life through love, they are ready to

break with every situation where man is victim. And while this search remains the same everywhere, the accent that it takes is often different, according to country :

If it is situated in the context of the consumer society of the northern hemisphere, a grass roots community, through its sharing of material goods and the simplicity of its life-style, will attempt to be a sign of contradiction in the face of the acceleration of the process of over-abundance in the rich countries, while at the same time being conscious of the potential for human promotion for all men that is contained in the technological civilisation.

A community situated in a poor country will also put the accent on sharing, and will seek out particularly ways of participating in development, committing itself boldly to the liberation of the whole man and and of all men.

TAIZÉ : International Meetings of preparation for the Council of Youth

Dates : Weekly, Monday evening through Sunday noon, from June 26 till September 10.

Work camp for preparing the meetings : arranging camp sites, etc. : 20 to 26 June.

Reception Team : Those who would like to help in the reception team, with all the different kinds of jobs that involves, are asked to write to us. This means arriving in Taizé before the beginning of the meeting, Friday evening at 19h.

Age : Youth from 18 to 29, including young married couples. An attempt will be made to balance the number of girls and men in each meeting. Each participant is asked to register for one week only.

Registration : By means of the form on the back page. Extra registration forms are available if needed. If you receive no reply, that means your registration has been carefully noted. If you are coming with a group, please send a form for each person.

Cost : This is left to the responsability of each person (indicative price 2.00 Dollars USA ; 70p UK). Those who can do so, give extra so as to share with those who come from very far away or else are unable to contribute to expenses.

Accommodation : Individual tents or large dormitory tents. Bring bedding material and, if possible, a tent.

A *Meeting* for all *Europe* will be held at Taizé next winter, at a date to be announced. Similar meetings will be held in the other continents, one in each. The *Meeting* for *Oceania* is already planned to take place in November in New Zealand.

Theme : « The Risen Christ is going to give us enough imagination and courage to become signs of contradiction ». Reflexion based on the Easter 1972 text.

Simultaneous Meetings : While everybody joins together for common prayer, the meetings themselves will be highly diversified, several parallel meetings will be held at the same time :

— Meeting of retreat and silence. General meetings will be few in number and their purpose will be to stimulate prayer and personal reflexion.

— Meetings for those who are beginning to prepare for the Council of Youth.

— Meetings for those who have already taken part in other meetings and want to go on from there.

In addition, within each meeting, focus groups according to peoples' interests will be set up at the beginning of each week. Simultaneous translation will be available, as necessary, every week. According to numbers, the main language used for the weeks 17 - 23 July and 31 July - 6 August will be English.

Individual Retreat : It is possible to continue after the meeting by making an individual retreat. Men and girls are housed in Taizé, the neighbouring villages and the womens' communities in the region. This can be arranged at the end of the meetings.

For the USA. A contribution of 2.00 Dollars is requested from those who receive the *Letter from Taizé* to defray publication expenses and postage :
« *Letter from Taizé* »
2150 Almaden Road, 114 — San Jose, Ca. 95125. USA.

Registration Form : SUMMER 1972

to be sent to :
YOUTH MEETINGS, F-71 Taizé-Community, France

Surname :

First Name :

Full address :

(with zip-code and country)

Profession : ..... year of birth : ....

Will take part in the meeting from Monday ..... *through*
Sunday .....

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé : yes / no.

Will bring own tent : yes / no.

Will arrive for the reception team (start previous friday 6pm)
yes / no.

Can join discussion groups in english — french — spanish — german — italian — portugese.

Can undertake simultaneous translation from ..... into .....

Wishes to receive ..... more registration forms.

Dir., Réd., Adm. Communauté de Taizé — D.L. : n° 351 — 2e tr. 1972